



CHITARRE 312

The Style of Vince Gill

Hello everyone and welcome to this new series of articles on country guitar. From this month we'll start a journey into country guitar to discover some of its stars and to talk about the trademarks which make this music so unique.

Before we dip into this month's topic it's important to say that the goal of this series is not to provide a bunch of licks playable only by the 'monsters' of this style. Instead the goal is to provide an entrance door for the vast majority of guitarists who already are familiar with the rock blues language and who are maybe looking for something new to expand their phrasing. For this very reason, in this first installment we'll be talking about Vince Gill.

Vince is a country music giant. Sings fantastically well, plays fantastically well, writes fantastically well and in the US fills stadiums. Basically he's one of the those (annoying) people who do everything fantastically well. In addition, he's a down-to-earth kinda guy, a typical 'nice-guy' as we say. If you happen to be in Nashville it's quite easy to meet him. He plays every Monday evening at the Station Inn with a very famous western swing band called Time Jumpers.

From a guitar point of view, Vince plays country as well as blues or western swing but his phrasing is not, really, unachievable from a technical point of view and this makes him a perfect candidate for our goal.

What distinguish a country guitarist from a rock-blues one?

- Notes: Country guitarists tend to use mainly major pentatonic whereas the rock-blues ones use mainly minor pentatonic.
- Technique: There are many micro-differences, for instance: bending. A rock-blues guitarist would normally bend the strings quite slowly because that's part of the style whereas country guitarists tend to bend in a much more mechanical way to emulate the sound of a pedal steel guitar.
- Tone: Usually it's the amount of distortion which separates the two styles. In country music it's quite rare to find the guitar part heavily distorted (although judging from the latest country albums it really looks like things are changing). Anyway, traditionally country music is played with a clean sound but in the last 20 years country guitar has become a bit angrier and now the 'traditional' sound is a very fat clean or a very light crunch.



To show these differences I composed a solo in the style of Vince Gill. The progression is in A, roughly 16 bars long and it uses as inspiration his “Liza Jane” (one of Vince’s most famous songs). From a technical point of view Vince is very recognizable for one thing: his supernatural intonation while bending. It happens quite frequently that, when trying his old Tele, one starts looking for a B-Bender (mechanism engaged by the strap which bends the B string a whole tone up, very common in country guitar) only to discover that it doesn’t have one. Everything is produced by the fingers although the sound suggests the use of a B-Bender.

To exercise your intonation on bending, I’ve composed the last phrase of the solo (which starts in bar 14). It’s a pedal steel type of lick and requires a great command of the bending technique. In addition the fretting hand is moving quite quickly along the neck and this makes it harder to stay relaxed. It’s the typical situation where many guitarist tense up and stop breathing (for a few seconds).

The rest of the solo is full of Gill-isms like for instance bars 4 and 5 where Vince emulates George Benson in playing the same note on different strings, or the double stops of bars 12 and 13. Basically there’s something for everyone! The best thing is to study the solo slowly, phrase by phrase in order to absorb all those little things (often unwritable) which make the difference between country and rock-blues guitar.

If there’s anything which isn’t clear just write me and ask me! Go to the website (www.dariocortese.com) and contact me through there. Enjoy it and I’ll see next month for another dose of country music!

TONE

Country guitar is normally played with a Telecaster (single coil) but nowadays you can really use anything. The amp is normally a valve one and again Fender is the most common choice although not the only one. A loud clean sound, where the amp starts breaking up or a light crunch are the most popular modern choices. Combine it with a compressor and a short delay (100ms-200ms) and you’ll get a killer tone!

RECOMMENDED LISTENING

Vince Gill - These Days (2006)

Vince is a very prolific writer and a workaholic. In 2006 instead of doing an album with 10/15 songs (like other humans), he came out with 40 songs (4 CD in a single album!). Each CD represents a different side of Vince, Rocking, Groovy, Country & Western and Acoustic. It’s also an album which is not ‘too’ country which makes it a great starting point for somebody who’s not familiar with this genre.



♩ = 181

A

5/4

TAB

2 4 2 | 4 2 0 4 0 4 2 0 | 3 4 2 3 2 0 2 0 | 0 0 5 0 5 0

5

TAB

5 0 5 0 0 4 2 4 2 2 2 4 | 4 3 5 4 (4) 2 4 2 | 2 2 4 1/2 4 2 3

9

C D

TAB

5 5 3 6 4 7 | 5 8 7 (7) 5 7 5 5 7/9 | 7 9 6 8 5 2 3 4

13

A

TAB

3 2 1 16 (16) 14 16 17 16 (16) 11 (11) 9 11 12 11 (11) 7

16

TAB

(7) 5 7 8 7 (7) 5 7 0 2 0 3 0